

**New Fatherhood in Practice?- Parental Leave in the UK**

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**Introduction**

This paper will use the concept of parental leave as a way to examine issues around fatherhood. The responsibilities of family and paid work impinge on each other because they both take up time and commitment. Specifically it is argued that "Because work has first claim on men, it limits the time men can spend with their families" (Blackstone et al. 1992: 12); that for men paid employment takes precedence and pushes out family time, excluding fathers from childcare activities. Parental leave appears to provide one way in which an accommodation between the competing interests might be possible, by forcing employers to allow parents time away from work expressly to engage in childcare (Fried 1998, Lewis and Lewis 1996, Wilkinson 1997). The addition of parental leave to the statute books in the UK marks the first time that employers must recognise their male employees as parents.

Parental leave was introduced as a legal right for employees for the first time in the UK in December 1999 under the auspices of the Employment Relations Act 1999. The paper will begin by exploring the picture of fathers envisaged by the government within this legislation. In the second part of the paper the actual conduct of parental leave will be examined by considering take up rates of parental leave in various European countries. The relatively small number of men who have taken advantage of the provisions provides a sharp contrast to the rhetoric of a cultural shift which suggests that men are eager to participate in childcare. The discrepancy between the two has commonly been explained in terms of the absence of financial remuneration for the period away from paid employment- fathers are unable to afford to take time away from employment because of the financial penalties incurred.

Using qualitative interview material the adequacy of this argument will be questioned. As part of a wider study, looking at how men who work in professional and managerial occupations combine their paid employment and family life, 25 in-depth semi-structured inter-

views were conducted with fathers who had young children. Those interviewed were asked about their own leave arrangements when children were born along with reflecting on what they felt about their time off work and commenting on the new parental leave legislation (which was in the process of being introduced when the interviews were conducted). These comments indicate how men's orientations towards fatherhood are a significant factor in how they interpret their new legal right.

### ***Parental Leave Legislation***

The first parental leave schemes were introduced in Hungary in 1967 and Sweden in 1974 (ILR 1997). Provisions have varied widely until the introduction of the European Union Directive on Parental Leave in 1996 provided a baseline of minimum standards, which has gone some way towards equalising the situation between member states.

Initially the UK opted out of the adoption of the directive but this decision was reversed after a change in government and the directive was implemented within the Employment Relations Act 1999. Under the UK legislation, employees who become parents are entitled to a total of 13 weeks of unpaid leave (designed to be broken up into a number of shorter amounts of time), which can be taken up until the child is aged five. Although employers and employees can make their own agreements over how the leave will work in practice in workplaces (Parental Leave summary guidance 1999) a 'fallback scheme' has been specified. Under this scheme leave can be taken for a minimum of a week at a time and a maximum of four weeks may be taken in any one year, 21 days notice should be given before the commencement of leave, postponement cannot be for longer than six months and is not possible at all if leave is proposed for immediately after the birth of a child.

As with other employment legislation, significant numbers of workers will fail to qualify; the self-employed, those on short-term contracts or working from agencies and people who have recently taken up employment. Additionally there are a few occupations (such as the police and armed forces) who are outside the legislation. Al-

though the government has encouraged employers to adopt 'good practice', with a loosening of the qualifying requirements and an extension of rights, it is likely that for many employers the default position of the fallback scheme will be adopted.

### *The Government Perspective*

While some uncertainties over the functioning of the legislation still require clarification, (Employment Law and European Union Briefing 1999) a number of sources outline the position of the present British government on the role fathers have as parents and to explain why this legislation is appropriate. In addition to speeches made by ministers in advocating the adoption of the legislation a number of written documents have been produced which emphasise particular themes. Summaries produced for employers and employees include the intentions of the legislation while, more expansively, the government policy document 'Supporting Families' (1998) and the White Paper 'Fairness at Work' (1998) formed the basis for the Employment Relations Bill 1999. The subsequent Green Paper 'Work and Parents: Competitiveness and Choice' (2000) suggested areas for further debate in advance of the most recent announcements relating to maternity, paternity and parental leave in March 2001. Many of the same arguments are found in earlier titles such as 'Men and their Children' (1996) and 'Next Left' (1992) whose authors have since held prominent positions in government.

Two themes appear dominant. Firstly that parenting, or rather good parenting, takes up significant proportions of time. Secondly, following from this, competing demands for time from work and family must be met in some way. The issue of time is certainly not new in considerations of childcare. From Bowlby's idea of 'maternal deprivation' (1953) to the eighties invention of 'quality time' there has been a consistent recognition that mothers need time with their children and may face conflicts in obtaining it. These 'partial views' (Dex and Rowthorn 1997) are replaced in these documents by an acknowledgement that these conflicts are the case for all parents. "Parents, both men and women, need time with their children and time to create a supportive

home in which their children can thrive” (White Paper ‘Fairness at Work’ 1998:31). Men are explicitly referred to because children need the involvement of both their parents. Fathers need time with children, or rather children need time with fathers and therefore men should supply it.

This view of parenthood which demands time is in competition with the demands on time from the world of paid employment. Significantly, the aim is not that parents should choose to devote their time to one area or the other. While time is important to children, parents are very definitely also workers and should not be excluded from the labour market because of parenting roles.

“Effective families- families which are good for children- also require a new sense of emotional as well as financial responsibility in men. Children need time as well as money from their parents” (Blackstone et al. 1992:11)

Emotional responsibility is required *along with* financial responsibility, not in place of it. While it is emphasised that children require time the accepted knowledge that they do also require money (and hence parents who earn) is not lost. Since parents are increasingly presumed to be in, or seeking, employment, the aim is towards making responsibilities at home and work easier to reconcile.

“The White Paper sets out policies that will enhance family life while making it easier for both men and women who work to avoid conflicts between their responsibilities at home and at work” (Margaret Beckett MP, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry publishing ‘Fairness at Work’ 21<sup>st</sup> May 1998)

It is made clear that the benefits from such a reorganisation accrue not only to individuals and families, but that businesses and society as a whole gain.

“Work and parenthood can create conflicting pressures...Helping employees to combine work and family life satisfactorily is good not only for parents and children but also for businesses” (‘Fairness at Work’ 1998:31)

This overall aim to strike a more appropriate balance between the worlds of work and family is viewed as reflecting a cultural situation that already exists. Tony Blair, in his foreword to 'Fairness at Work', writes that although a change in law cannot bring about a change in culture "a change in law can reflect a new culture, can enhance its understanding and support its development". Implementing this legislation is not forcing parents into a direction they do not wish to go because it is not possible for legal changes to do this. Instead the legislation allegedly reflects an existing desire among members of society which is only presently impossible to realise because of structural barriers. Policy should work with, and be adapted to, people's changing practice (Blackstone et al. 1992) and the government sets as its task enabling parents to more easily achieve the equilibrium for which they are striving.

### *Leave in Practice*

If parental leave does indeed tap into the desire of parents (with the focus here particularly on men) to spend more time with their children, then the expected response would be to find that fathers embrace the opportunity when it is presented to them. In Britain the take-up rate is a lowly 3% of parents ('Work and Parents' 2000). However this figure may be unreliable in terms of predicting future levels of take-up as it refers only to leave that was taken within the first year of the legislation being introduced.

However, in the remainder of the EU, where parental leave regulations have been in place for longer, it appears that an overwhelming positive response has manifestly failed to occur. Men are not using the parental leave to which they are entitled and instead almost all parental leave is taken by mothers (Haas 1993, Harker 1996, ILR 1997, Kaul 1991, Moss 1992). In Austria 90% of women take parental leave compared to 1% of men, in Finland the figures are 99% of women and 2% of men. The same pattern is replicated elsewhere, in Germany, 2% of men take parental leave compared to 96% of women while in Denmark in 1996 28,326 mothers had parental leave while the same was true of only 2,253 of fathers, or 4%. (EOC 1999, Rostgaard et al. 1999). Only

Sweden stands out as the exception with 50% of fathers taking some leave (EOC1999).

“Across Europe men seldom avail themselves of the right to take parental leave...fathers usually return to work immediately with no reduction in hours” (Palomba 1995:188)

The practice of parental leave does not correspond with the optimistic discourse of father involvement. To begin to address why this is the case it is worth making the comparison between parental leave and paternity leave.

Looking only at the statistics on parental leave the reader could be forgiven for concluding that any reports of the involved father are largely unsubstantiated. Yet the picture for paternity leave is very different. It is perhaps unsurprising that in Sweden almost all men take paternity leave (Moss 1999) but much higher take-up rates compared to parental leave are also found in other countries. In Denmark half of men take their legal allotment of two weeks (Carlsen 1995) while in Finland 33% of fathers take either one or two weeks of their paternity leave entitlement (Mikkola 1991). In countries where paternity leave is not included in legislation individual employers may offer paternity leave. In the UK one survey found that, of the companies they considered, 24% offered paternity leave and most of the men to whom it was available took advantage of it (Forth et al. 1996). Furthermore men may also take time off under the guise of holidays or sick leave (Jackson 1984, Bell et al. 1983). Forth et al. (1996) found that in the UK 93% of men had taken some time off work on the birth of a child while in the United States a smaller study of 142 fathers found that 87% had taken some days off work (Pleck 1993).

### **The Financial Argument**

Many commentators believe that the explanation for the discrepancy between the take up in the two forms of leave centres on the economic, as a bigger drop in income is experienced when taking parental leave compared to paternity leave. In countries where leave is paid it is often paid at a higher rate for paternity leave and this combined with the shorter period of paternity leave means that the financial loss is less.

Therefore fathers are more likely to take paternity rather than parental leave.

This belief is advanced through a comparison of the situation in various countries which vary on the level of payments made. It is widely stated that those countries with the highest proportions of fathers taking parental leave tend to be the Scandinavian countries where there is the highest financial compensation for the time absent from earning a wage (ILR 1997). Sweden is often used as the example par excellence of the positive effect that introducing reasonable levels of payment can bring, combining one of the most generous compensation packages with one of the highest levels of take up rates among fathers. In addition this argument can also turn to evidence from Denmark where a reduction in the level of payment for child care leave between 1998 and 2000 (from 80% to 60% of unemployment benefit) has been associated with a reduction in the taking of leave (Rostgaard 1999).

In the UK the Commons Select Committee on Social Security concluded in its report on the issue of remuneration for parental leave that, "it is clear to us that if parental leave is unpaid take-up among fathers will be particularly low" (1999). The Incomes Data Services comments in similar fashion that "While parental leave is unpaid...take-up by parents is likely to remain limited" (2000:1). Whether the taking of parental leave is viewed as desirable or not, it seems accepted that the offer of pay during parental leave will affect the decision to take up the new legal right, and that it is especially influential on fathers. The conclusion is that men are willing to take leave when finances allow and that (unpaid) parental leave is simply an unaffordable opportunity.

Since a fundamental reason for undertaking paid employment is the payment aspect it is unsurprising that finance is a significant consideration. Yet despite making some difference the introduction of payment can certainly not be said to increase the numbers of men taking parental leave to very significant levels. The House of Commons Select Committee (1999) notes that male take up rates with a flat-rate payment are only 1-2%. Even in Sweden with 50% of fathers taking

some leave this still means that half of fathers are not taking any parental leave, and only 10% of men take their allocation (EOC 1999). Although larger numbers of men are encouraged to take leave when it is paid, the majority of men still fail to do so. While the issue of payment deserves attention, alone, it cannot hope to explain the reasons for men's reluctance to accept parental leave "paying parental leave does not in itself guarantee take up amongst fathers" (New Ways to Work 1999). The Swedish achievements have been accomplished at least as much because of government campaigns to encourage father involvement accompanied by decisive leadership in taking leave allowances by government ministers (Haas 1993, Højgaard 1997, Marsiglio 1995).

Payment is likely to remain a topic of debate but limiting discussion to narrow economic concerns fails to capture a broader understanding of fathers' positions within paid employment and the family. That there is no simple correlation between payment of leave and take-up rates is not to argue that the situation and status of men's employment does not affect participation in childcare. The construction of employment means that men (as workers) are limited both by what they are expressly permitted to do and also what is seen as acceptable within their employing organisation. This operates through explicit employer policies restricting leave and through the culture of workplaces which posit appropriate and inappropriate behaviour for employees. Christoffersen (1990) found that fathers received many more critical comments from colleagues about taking parental leave than did mothers. Another aspect which has received attention is the influence of mothers on what fathers do, e.g. in Denmark a correlation has been found between mothers having longer vocational training and fathers increased likelihood of taking parental leave (Christoffersen 1990). However, showing that obstructions to men's participation in childcare exist does not mean that one can be sure that without them fathers would act radically differently. It sometimes appears from the literature that all influence originates in either the structural elements of employment or with female partners.

Attitudes towards the taking of leave are bound up with men's orientations towards paid employment and family. For those employed in professional and managerial jobs the intrinsic satisfaction which they get from their jobs may be influential in limiting the time seen as available for children (Dermott 2001). Differences in the take up rates of parental and paternity leave can also suggest the existence of different concepts of fathering. To explore the idea of this association requires avoiding a simplistic belief in a transformed fatherhood which naively posits that all fathers want to behave differently from the results of empirical observation.

### **Fathers' Views**

Turning to my own qualitative material it is possible to categorise the interviewees in three groups on the basis of how they viewed the taking of leave for childcare. They have been termed the 'no leavers', 'paternity leavers', and 'parental leavers'.

#### *'No Leavers'*

The fathers in the first group tended to have taken short periods of paternity leave with the most popular option being a couple of days. Extremely short periods of time were spent away from work by some of the fathers, with no time at all in one case.

I took a couple of days I think when Katie was born but nothing when Clare was born... It may have been a couple of mornings, and [I] left early to collect her from the hospital and bring her home type of thing. But not any time off at all (Bill)

I actually can't remember, I really can't remember, probably not. I may have taken a couple of hours off (Marcus)

It could be asserted that this inability to take longer amounts of time off work after the birth is precisely the issue that needs to be addressed. However these fathers did not feel that they had missed out and were not disappointed to have been unable to take a longer amount of time.

Interviewer: Would you liked to have had some time off?

Marcus: I'm not sure really

...

Interviewer: On the questionnaire you said that men should get one week paternity leave?

Marcus: Maybe men should get a week off but I am not sure... I am not so sure if I would want to take a week off, I'm not sure how beneficial that would be.

Hugh, who took only a couple of days leave when each of his other children were born, commented

I do recall with the first one when I took a week off I was pretty desperate to get back to work actually (laughs). So I mean, I suspect the evidence is it was about right.

This corresponds with their responses that men should be entitled to paternity leave, but that it should be for only a week. The role of the father after the birth of a child was couched very much in terms of supporting the mother of the child and this was the justification for spending time away from work.

For a week or two after a child is born I see that as when of course, your wife has gone through a very horrible experience, she is tired, the baby is getting up at night...your wife needs support (Jack)

Obviously the first one...it was sort of doing all the support work because we didn't have clue what we were doing (Hugh)

Adopting this mind-set means that it is only in exceptional circumstances that taking time away from work is seen as necessary.

Don't get me wrong, if there was a problem with the thing, with the birth, if there was anything like that, clearly one's duty and one's responsibility are with one's wife. But day-to-day when things go straight...I really think it's unreasonable for people to expect [to take time off] (Bill)

It therefore follows that these fathers felt no personal need for the newly introduced parental leave- "I wouldn't have taken it" (Derek). Legislation was viewed as unnecessary at best; the feeling

was mainly that if employees really wished to take leave then there were other mechanisms available such as holiday entitlement and sick leave.

If people want to take time off and they're sufficiently demotivated they are likely to take it off on the sick and get paid, that would be my view of it (Bill)

As well as having no interest in taking up the entitlement themselves they also generalised that their perspective would be the majority view. Parental leave was commented upon as if had to be an extension of time already taken at the birth of a child (even though the regulations had been specified).

Not for me, I wouldn't do it. I guess there are some people. I can't imagine actually anyone I know would want to take three months off to be at home with a new born baby (Marcus)

I would be very surprised if any men actually asked for it, unless a fun thirteen weeks holiday! You know if I had thirteen weeks unpaid leave I'm not sure I would want to spend it at home with a small baby (Hugh)

This group acknowledges that the arrival of a child usually requires men to take some time away from work, framed in terms of 'helping' their partner. It is notable that unlike the majority of other fathers interviewed these men tended to take a longer absence of work for the birth of their first child than for subsequent children as the mother is viewed as requiring more assistance after the experience of a first birth. Once she is au fait with the procedures of childcare then the father's obligation to be present is reduced. For these men becoming a father, especially for the first time, is a momentous occasion, a few days off work is justified and being present at the birth is accepted as normal practice. Jack says "I was there for the birth certainly...I assume I probably took a few days off". However involvement does not occur at the expense of paid employment as mothers take the lead in, and responsibility for, childcare. In similar fashion to an absence from work because of illness or for a holiday, leave from work on the birth of a child fits specific parameters; a pre-scheduled, bounded period which is a break from normal circumstances and when leave is com-

pleted things return to the routine. Spending a significant portion of time singularly devoted to childcare, as parental leave allows, does not correspond to the image they have of themselves as fathers and they do not view the introduction of legislation to accommodate fathers as either relevant to them or necessary.

*'Parental Leavers'*

The second group (parental leavers) contrast most radically from the first group. While there was wide variation in the amount of time they had taken away from work on the birth of a child (from a couple of days to three months) they would have liked longer. When asked about the length of time they thought new fathers should be offered, two weeks was the shortest amount anyone suggested with the remainder feeling a month or more was reasonable.

I was probably still in a bit of a headspin when I came back to work, I don't think two weeks is enough after the birth of a child really to get yourself back into a normal state. (Phil)

I think to go back after five days is quite hard actually... to do five days [full-time work] was quite a lot really, it was a bit too much when you have just got a new baby and all that to deal with. (Rami)

As well as believing that paternity leave should exist for a meaningful length of time parental leave was regarded positively.

Oh, I certainly would have taken it, it would have been nice to take (Tony)

Yeah, I had heard about that actually. I can see that being very useful (Rami)

I think it is an excellent idea. I have no problem whatsoever with the government putting pressure on employers to give people time off to look after their children...if anything it is not enough (Phil)

Most said that they would have taken at least some of the leave, even if it was only available unpaid (four of the fathers had previously taken some unpaid leave). Although the lack of payment was occasionally mentioned as ruling some people out, "not everybody would

be able to afford it" (Ivan), for the most part finances were not referred to as an important consideration.

When speaking about the reasons for being involved in childcare they emphasised developing a bond with their child(ren) and frequently mentioned the emotional aspects of their relationship with the child.

It is that emotional stuff that paternity leave would have given me, would have given all fathers (Simon)

Immediately there was like this bonding thing going on... You know your kids are only, you have only got that one chance really, and you want to spend some time with them and develop a bond with them I think (Rami)

Some of the fathers also stressed that the caring for children would be a shared venture

I think we were very clear about, that we'd agreed to share the childcare. (Michael)

Well, certainly participatory, a father who was there, that Sheila and I should share things all the time (Tony)

Since childcare was an ongoing venture it demanded a time commitment over an extended period. Paternity leave immediately after the birth was therefore relatively less important and concentrating all time off at this point was seen as inappropriate.

I extended it [leave] myself, but not in a block because you don't need that time when they are first born...you need it for other times after that.(Simon)

Maybe two months at the beginning is maybe too long...I think some flexibility as to when that time can be taken would be useful, say over the period of maternity leave (Michael)

The parental leavers view fatherhood as an ongoing commitment involving active caring for children, which will necessarily impact on other areas of their life including their paid work. A commitment of time towards children is judged necessary in order to

build up the type of relationship they desire. Parental leave is seen as assisting in this aim as it allows time specifically with children. For some, the new parental leave regulations legislate for action that they have already taken in the form of unpaid leave and overall the issue of payment is not viewed as the determining factor in taking time away from work. Paternity leave is seen as relatively less important because it only supplies a brief amount of time at a specific period which is insufficient to build up a meaningful, long-term relationship between father and child.

*'Paternity Leavers'*

The final group (paternity leavers) falls somewhere between the two other groups. In terms of time taken for paternity leave there was again a range but most commonly the period was one to two weeks. These fathers were reasonably happy with the length of time they had been given as it corresponded with what they thought seemed reasonable.

For the first one I took three weeks, for the second one I took a week I think...They were [a] very rich and positive time. If I wanted four weeks or five weeks or six weeks or twenty weeks, quite possibly [I could have taken them] but I didn't (William)

Interviewer: Were you happy with that amount of time?

John: Oh yeah, yeah, I'm not complaining about that at all (two weeks leave)

The period after the birth was viewed as an especially important time

I think that those first days are really important, for everyone, and I think it would be really sad to miss out on that time (Gareth)

It would have to be a pretty big thing not to take time off when children came (George)

The position on parental leave was ambiguous, while not overly supportive about the concept in its present incarnation neither did they condemn it. The issue of how an individual would finance the leave was mentioned, while it had been largely absent from the comments of

the other fathers. A qualified welcome for legislation, often phrased in terms which were very general rather than related to their own position, was the result.

Some people can afford it, other people can't, that's the problem isn't it. Um, yes, I think they should. I think that it's better to have the right, even though it's not paid, than not to have any rights (George)

That sounds great but I am fairly sure that in practice all those people who are sessional or who are working for agencies wouldn't benefit particularly (John)

It sounds very civilised, if society can afford it... These would be seen as being the moves that will progress society (Euan)

However time away from work was understood mainly as an occasional requirement for special school activities or emergencies such as illness, and parental leave was sometimes interpreted in this way.

If a child is ill, you see, I think it would work (Greg)

I think principally what's important is being available. What I mean is being able to go to the sports days and parents days... If you need to collect [from school] or whatever (William)

That [special leave] should be built into legislation, for emergencies... If your child is ill or something they should be able to take time off (George)

Explaining the scheme that operates at his workplace Jim says

One morning the telephone rings at half 8 when you're about to leave, the childminder says "there's been an accident, I can't look after Paul today", and there's nobody to look after him. Under those circumstances we can get leave, and it's paid... I thought that was quite a good scheme.

This final group are perhaps the most interesting and provide most evidence for the distinction between parental and paternity leave. Unlike the 'no leavers' they did not view mothers as having necessarily to take primary responsibility for childcare, but there was none of the concerted effort expressed by the 'parental leavers' which pushed for substantial and equal involvement in the upbringing of children. The

idea of having planned periods at home in order to be with children, except for around the period of the birth, did not make sense or register as an advantage. What interested them most was the idea of some flexibility to take time away from work for shorter periods of time, either for scheduled events such as the school play, or for occasions which were not able to be planned in advance such as a child's illness. When in these situations only a few hours is needed they felt that it should be possible to be permitted the flexibility to make up the time later. This accommodation suggests a realisation that mothers will not, and perhaps should not, be the only parent responsible for childcare; however, the times when work should accommodate to family should be only in 'emergency' situations. A father should be prepared to re-schedule and adapt to the new demands made of him with the arrival of his new status, but this can be relatively easily accommodated alongside existing concerns.

### ***Orientalions to Leave***

When O'Brien and Jones (1995) surveyed a group of young people in East London about their views on fatherhood three types of responses were given as to why a father should take leave; to help the mother, because it was 'right' and to bond with the child. These crudely correspond with the positions outlined for the groups above. For the 'no leavers' there is a distinct division between the roles of mother and father and in terms of childcare, especially immediately after birth, the mother has pre-eminence. The 'paternity leavers' are in step with the societal norms of the moment which suggest that fathers should be at home for some time after their partner gives birth, but without too much consideration about what childcare will entail in the future. In contrast the 'parental leavers' are making their choice based predominantly on their desire to have a particular kind of relationship with their offspring.

It is worth recording that the language of 'involvement' and 'participatory fathering' was not exclusive to any one group but present among all fathers. Tony (parental leave) says that he is "participatory", Jim (paternity leave) that he "wanted to... take part in his

upbringing" and Jack (no leave) remarks "I wanted to be involved with my kids". Very similar statements about fathering can be found scattered throughout the interviews yet as we have seen they co-exist alongside enormously contrasting views on leave taking. It is a mistake to infer from limited statements about a desire for involvement that all fathers translate this into the same behaviour.

### **Conclusions**

As it is currently presented parental leave is a system which supports balancing work and homelife in two senses. It operates by allowing time for parents to spend with their children to redress, at least to some small degree, the imbalance between the hours spent at work and the hours spent at home. It also is a way of balancing work and family between partners. The European Council Recommendation on Childcare states that

Member States should promote and encourage, with due respect for the freedom of the individual, increased participation by men ( in the care and upbringing of children), in order to achieve a more equal sharing of parental responsibilities between men and women (92/241/EEC1992 art.6)

Theoretically it has much to commend it. However, unless men are taking parental leave there is no hope for a more equal division of childcare labour between men and women. Indeed if women take their thirteen week allocation and men do not, the legislation could result in exacerbating the division over responsibility for early childcare instead of reducing it.

Parental leave fits into a range of rights which assist parents in accommodating their work and family commitments and different forms of leave appeal to different ideas about the role of fathers. The aims of such social policy measures are expressed as the promotion of fathering involvement with children and a movement towards greater gender equality. Attempting to ensure that parents are excluded neither from the labour market nor childcare requires a more comprehensive approach to understanding the relationships between paid employment and family life than a reliance on finance alone.

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